

As Gorillas Go, Six-Month-Old Patty Cake Is a Charming Monkey

By DEIRDRE CARMODY

In a sun-dappled cage on the south side of the Lion House, the superstar of the Central Park Zoo is eating sliced bananas. Suddenly she cocks her wizened head. Her brown eyes begin to gleam. She tenses, and—with a burst

of utter glee—she pounces on a banana peel.

Her three keepers beam. It is, after all, the first time she has ever pounced on a banana peel.

This is Patty Cake, the baby gorilla of the Central Park Zoo, who is six months old this week. As a crowd-

pleaser, she is the hottest item in town. John FitzGerald, the zoo's director, estimates that if the crowds continue to throng as they have so far, Patty Cake will have drawn an additional half a million people to the zoo by the time she is a year old.

Susan Green, a pain home in the Bronx almost went to see the baby gorilla every day since then.

Miss Green arrives, by special permission, at 8:30 A.M. (the Lion House is open to the public from 11 A.M. to 5 P.M. seven days a week) and stays until late afternoon, sketching Patty Cake and taking notes. She has done an enormous amount of research on gorillas since September plans to write a book about them.

"I've never even heard the gorillas describe the things seen here," she said.

The main thing that has intrigued Mrs. Green, and her experts as well, is the fierceness and care that Lulu shown toward her baby. According to Mr. FitzGerald, gorillas do not know how to take care of their young in captivity. Usually offsprings are taken from their mothers and raised by humans.

Lulu is such a fantastic mother; she has done everything right for this baby," Mrs. Green said.

Kongo, Clowns

Lulu paid little heed to the conversation. She was busy trying to grab the eyeglasses of her keepers. When she failed, she reached down to undo his shoelaces. She pulled his pants cuff a tug of good measure and, light-like, made a grab at the contents of his breast pocket. She seemed immensely satisfied with herself.

Meanwhile Kongo, the 8-year-old, 260-pound father, eyed apples over the top of the bars at the crowd.

Lulu and her baby were in a separate cage in the beginning, for fear that Kongo might become jealous—or simply clumsy—and harm the baby. When Patty Cake was 28 days old, she and her mother were reunited with Kongo, and the gorilla-watchers were again surprised by the male gorilla's tenderness and care.

At first, Kongo just gazed at the baby. Then one day he stretched out one of his mammoth hands toward the little gorilla, extended a leathery finger and gently touched the baby on the arm. Later, to Lulu's dismay, he became braver and more possessive.

A Bathing Act

One day Kongo grabbed the baby, sat down and planted her between his legs. Then, very carefully, he dipped his hand in some water and began washing the baby's face, fending off the frantic mother with the other hand. Finally, after about 20 minutes, he returned the baby to Lulu, who huffily proceeded to lick the baby's face clean.

"Kongo and Lulu are a very devoted pair," Mr. FitzGerald said. "They'll put their arms around each other or one will go up and give the other a kiss and seem to say, 'How's the baby?' The other day they put the baby down in the corner, and they had a good wrestle in the middle of the cage while the baby watched."

Luis Cerna, Richard Regano and Edelmiro Rodriguez, the three keepers in the Lion House (which houses several leopards, three lions, two tigers and two other gorillas besides the Kongo family), hover around Lulu's cage like doting parents.

It is now mid-morning and Lulu, an actress to the end, finds a patch of sunlight in the corner of the cage and sprawls on her back. In the manner of the great tragediennes, she drapes one arm across her eyes and flings the other above her head.

Then the superstar of the Central Park Zoo climbs across her mother's vast stomach, snuggles into a warm spot, closes her eyes and, exhausted, falls asleep.



Patty Cake, Central Park Zoo's baby gorilla, who is 6 months old this week, peering from her enclosure yesterday